

■ EDU GUIDE ■

Pursuing an undergraduate degree in Japan

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

A.M. FAHAD

Japan, the land of anime, *sakura* blossoms, and *udon* is a dreamscape destination for many across the globe. Though Japan is renowned for its rich culture and beautiful travel destinations, the country also offers extensive opportunities for higher education, making it an increasingly popular choice among international students aspiring to study abroad.

"I sought guidance from several seniors and acquaintances to hear about their experiences before applying. Online workshops hosted by Japanese universities are also extremely helpful in that regard; they are notably informative and are also arranged frequently," says Sharif Mashrafi, an incoming freshman at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU).

Japanese universities offer a diverse range of curricula that provide students with both specialised knowledge and a broad educational foundation. Many of these universities offer courses taught in English, and they typically offer high amounts of scholarships for international students in the form of tuition fee reductions, admission fee exemptions, or both.

Haseen Tabassum, a first-year student at Tokyo International University shares, "The biggest influencing factor for my choosing Japan was the scholarships. My parents could only afford to send me here given that I take care of my expenses. I received a 100 percent scholarship, and the scholarships typically cover from 30 percent to up to 100 percent of your expenses. Jobs are easy to find here. Your visa allows you to work 28 hours a week, and most of the time, it is enough for you to pay your tuition fees while sustaining your living costs, depending on the amount of scholarship you were awarded and the area you live in."

He continued, "However, it is worth mentioning that, to be able to work, you have to know a certain level of Japanese. I didn't learn it when I was in Bangladesh and that has caused me some bumps here and there. But it's always a great idea to get your n5 certification – a test that certifies your understanding of basic Japanese – with the time you have before classes start. It'll also

help you land better part-time jobs when you're here."

The Japanese government also offers a fully-funded scholarship program known as MEXT. MEXT is an extensive scholarship program that covers all the expenses of studying in Japan. There are two ways to apply for the MEXT scholarship. When applying through the embassy track, MEXT recipients are initially screened by the Japanese Embassy. In contrast, when applying through the university track, MEXT recipients are screened by the individual universities they applied to. Details of the scholarship are updated on the Japanese Embassy website.

Other than that, organisations such as JASSO (Japan Student Service Organisation) offer scholarships in the form of financial aid to international students to help cover living costs in Japan. Local governments also provide scholarships to students living in their district and attending schools in their district.

The application system is fairly simple. To apply to a university in Japan, you will need your high-school transcripts, including your O/A Levels/equivalent or your SSC/HSC grades. You will also need your English proficiency test scores (IELTS/TOEFL/Duolingo). Standardised test scores such as the SAT/ACT are welcomed but are entirely optional.

It is also to be noted that most Japanese universities have their own formats for letters of recommendation. Your teacher might be asked to fill up a form containing basic information as well as answer questions that dictate how highly they are willing to recommend you. Most universities will require you to write scholarship essays and two letters of recommendation. Having done everything mentioned above, you'll be mostly set for the application process. If you have inquiries regarding your application or parts of the application process, you can always reach out to the universities through email.

"The Japanese application process is incredibly straightforward. The universities I applied to were responsive via email and were happy to attend to any queries I had. In most cases, they will respond to your queries within 24 hours, except on national holidays," says Farhan Sadeque, a Fall '27 applicant.

One thing most international students mention while transitioning into the Japanese lifestyle is the culture shock. Even though the thought of it may not pose much of a problem during the application period, it is worth mentioning that the Japanese culture takes time to get used to.

"I would say a lot of things are different mainly because of the language barrier, which is what people should prepare for the most. While transportation

here is convenient, you have to learn how to navigate through the systems. Food and culture norms are very different here as well, but that comes with moving to any foreign country. Another thing which isn't as big a deal I suppose is how Japanese people speak. They try to refrain from being direct. So, if they say: 'It's best not to do that,' they might mean don't do it at all. But this is just one of the many cultural elements you will learn to adapt to once you arrive," says Anika Chowdhury, a 7th-semester student at APU.

An important factor worth considering while moving into a new country is its safety. In that regard, Mahir Chowdhury, a third-year student at Hosei University in Tokyo, says, "Problems of racial or ethnic prejudice aren't a concern in Japan, as the Japanese people are known

Japanese universities offer a diverse range of curricula that provide students with both specialised knowledge and a broad educational foundation.

for their hospitality. I will say that Japan is among one of the safest countries to live in. For example, you can leave your belongings in any corner of a public space and still find them in the same place after hours. Petty crimes such as theft and pickpocketing are uncommon to the point that they are seen as a big deal when anyone's belongings get stolen."

"Being a foreigner in a highly homogeneous country like Japan, you will get stares almost every day, but they're not necessarily bad. When it comes work/renting places, often they prefer their own people over the foreigners as they may have had unfortunate experiences with foreigners. With that being said, individual experiences in Japan may vary depending your university and area of residence," adds Mahir.

At the end of the day, choosing your university is an important decision, and you should take a respectable amount of time to consider the options you have.

"If I were to look back on my application journey, I would say that I should have trusted the holistic process and not been so hard on myself. During this application period, we should be patient with ourselves and prepare for what's next," adds Mashrafi.

ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

